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AUTOMATED SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR MANAGING GOALS

Technical Field of the Invention

This invention relates in general to the field of data processing. More specifically, this invention relates to an automated system and method for
5   establishing and maintaining teams and goals within an organization.

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Background of the Invention

A typical large business organization includes
numerous teams of people, with one or more specific tasks
assigned to each of the teams. Traditionally a business
5   tends to define it's teams in terms of the business'
chain of command (i.e. the reporting chain). For
example, a typical business sales division has a number
of sales teams, each led by a manager who reports to a
vice president of sales. In this type of chain-of-
10   command structure, members of a sales team are "direct
reports" of their manager. Other members of the
organization typically must coordinate activities with a
sales team member through that member's reporting
structure.

15   Company's generally identify certain strategic and
tactical goals, which they believe will lead the company
to success. Managers typically establish goals for their
reporting units, and employees of companies are also
often encouraged to establish personal goals.

20   Business leaders have come to recognize a number of
advantages associated with adopting more flexible
strategies for organizing teams and setting goals to
supplement the rigid, hierarchical reporting structures
traditionally found in large organizations. For example,
25   rather than requiring all team members to have the same
supervisor, a more flexible strategy allows at least some
teams to include members from different levels of a
reporting chain and/or from different reporting chains.
Teams with members from different reporting chains are
30   considered cross-functional teams. For instance, a sales
manager may be assigned to a product development team

charged with creating a salable product. Such a cross-
functional team increases the likelihood that a developed
product will be commercially viable.

 5   Similarly, another flexible strategy for organizing
teams and setting goals allows team leaders to set team
goals, without utilizing the conventional reporting chain
as the sole factor in determining who may be chosen as
team leaders. Furthermore, adoption of flexible and
dynamic strategies for creating, modifying, and removing

10   teams and goals facilitates more rapid and effective
adaptation to changes in the business environment for the
organization as a whole, provided that those strategies
are well implemented.

        A disadvantage associated with flexible and dynamic

15   strategies for managing teams and goals, however, is that
such strategies typically result in team and goal
structures with increased complexity, compared to
traditional chain-of-command strategies for managing
teams and goals. For example, effective personal goals

20   align with team goals and organization-wide goals. In a
flexible and dynamic environment, however, organization-
wide, team, and personal goals are rarely static, as
company objectives, products, personnel responsibilities,
and personnel team memberships may frequently change in

25   response to changing conditions in a realistic business
environment.

        Flexible and dynamic strategies for managing teams
and goals are therefore typically much more difficult to
implement. Although conventional management information

30   systems (MISs) may provide basic functionality for
storing static goals, conventional MISs generally lack

facilities for overcoming the difficulties associated
with flexible and dynamic strategies for managing teams
and goals.

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Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates to a system and a method for managing goals. In one embodiment of the present invention, a goal management system stores at least first and second goals. The goal management system also stores a relationship between the first goal and the second goal. In response to detecting modification of the first goal, the goal management system causes the second goal to be automatically highlighted for alignment verification.

In another embodiment, the second goal is a parent goal to the first goal, and the relationship is stored as a parent link associating the first goal with the parent goal. The goal management system also stores an owner for the first goal. In response to detecting modification of the parent goal, the goal management system causes the first goal to be automatically highlighted for alignment verification in a display associated with the owner of the first goal, based on the parent link.

In one embodiment, goals managed in accordance with embodiments of the invention can be displayed using a computer system to visually verify and manipulate alignment in accordance with information and rules provided by a goal management system.

The above summarized embodiments thus facilitate managing goals through, for example, goal alignment. Additional embodiments provide other technological solutions which facilitate goal alignment.

Brief Description of the Drawings

A more complete understanding of the invention and its objectives and advantages may be acquired by referring to the following description and the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIGURE 1 is a table with two columns respectively depicting a static chain of teams and a dynamic chain of teams, with arrows highlighting some differences between the static and dynamic chains;

FIGURE 2 is a block diagram depicting relationships between goals, teams, and people according to an example goal management system;

FIGURE 3 is a block diagram depicting relationships between and among teams and various types of goals according to the example goal management system;

FIGURE 4 is a block diagram of the logical components of the example goal management system;

FIGURE 5 is a flow chart depicting a process for managing goals according to the example goal management system;

FIGURE 6 depicts an exemplary user interface for displaying and managing goals according to the example goal management system;

FIGURE 7 depicts an example user interface for summarizing goal alignment status according to the example goal management system; and

FIGURES 8 and 9 depict user interface screens from an example wizard that facilitates goal alignment.

Detailed Description

Overview

The difficulties associated with supporting flexible
5   strategies for team and goal management include
challenges relating to keeping people advised of changes
to goals and teams, obtaining feedback on new goals and
goal modifications, and ensuring that goals are organized
in a logical and useful way.

10   For instance, the leader or owner of a team may
change the goals and personnel of that team, such as in
response to altered business requirements. These two
changes have downstream cascading effects that can alter
numerous aspects of team and goal management, such as
15   goal alignment, goal organization, and maintenance of a
comprehensive goal list.

Also, a team member may decide that a new team
should be created to assist with one or more team goals.
In a dynamic environment, such initiatives are generally
20   encouraged. However, if teams are created without regard
to the organization's chain-of-command, there is greater
risk that some teams will have inconsistent or redundant
goals.

Moreover, in a dynamic environment, each individual
25   may be associated with numerous teams. Belonging to many
teams generally makes it difficult for an individual to
reconcile all of the different personal responsibilities
associated with those teams and to keep abreast of all
pertinent goal changes. In addition, when a team leader
30   may not be the supervisor of the team members, it can be
more difficult for the team members to obtain feedback on

their goals from people in appropriate positions to
evaluate those goals with regard to the organization's
other goals.

5   Consequently, organizations with flexible team and
goal management strategies generally have an increased
need for systems and methods which effectively organize
teams and goals and the need for systems and methods
which provide clear explanations of team and goal
relationships. Therefore, a need has arisen for methods
10   and systems for managing teams and goals in organizations
with flexible team and goal environments. A further need
exists for methods and systems which keep people advised
of changes relating to goals and teams. A further need
exists for methods and systems which assist in obtaining
15   feedback on new goals and goal modifications. A further
need exists for methods and systems which keep goals
organized consistently with respect to corresponding
teams. A further need exists for methods and systems
which keep goals organized consistently with respect to
20   goal type and team affiliation.

As recognized by embodiments of the present
invention, among the technologies useful in a goal
management system for a dynamic environment is a
technology for aligning goals. In general, a secondary
25   goal is considered to be "aligned" or "in alignment" with
a primary goal if the secondary goal assists in the
realization of the primary goal. For example, with
reference to FIGURE 3, the secondary goal of implementing
all required features in software Product Z is aligned
30   with the primary goal of producing software that meets
all specs. In an example embodiment of the present

invention, goal alignment technologies are implemented as parts of a goal management system that operate on a computer or network of computers.

An embodiment of the present invention makes it
5   easier for an individual to keep his or her goal aligned with other goals, such as parent goals. The embodiment accomplishes that objective by automatically advising the individual of changes to the other goals by effecting changes to a user interface in a client data processing
10   system. Consequently, individuals who create goals with links to other goals need not constantly monitor the other goals to determine whether any changes have been made.

In another embodiment, a goal owner need not
15   manually request feedback from his or her supervisor every time the goal owner creates or changes a goal. Instead, the embodiment automatically highlights the new or modified goal for review by the supervisor.

Another embodiment helps team leaders avoid creating
20   inconsistent or duplicative goals by enforcing rules which require certain relationships between the organization's goals and its teams.

Example Embodiments
25   Referring now to FIGURE 4, goal management system 10 is an example of a system that provides the technological ability to maintain alignment of goals from the personal level to the highest company strategic initiative. Goal management system 10 has application to a wide range of
30   industries and other organizations where goals and alignment of goals can be important. Example beneficiary

industries include: computer hardware and software,
professional services, financial services, automotive,
telecommunications, medical and pharmaceutical, and
construction.

5   Goal management system 10 uses two basic team types:
static teams and dynamic teams. The static teams depict
the reporting chain of an organization and correspond,
for example, to the management structure recorded in the
organization's human resources (HR) database.

10   Specifically, FIGURE 1 includes a left column that lists
Acme's static teams and a right column that lists Acme's
dynamic teams, where Acme is an example organization.
The static teams correspond to the Acme reporting chain.

      To ensure that the stored static teams are organized
15   according to the reporting chain, goal management system
10 implements the following rules for managing static
teams:

      1. every static team has one owner and zero or more
         team members,

20   2. the owner of a static team is the person who
         represents the team in the HR database,

      3. the owner of the static team at the top of the
         reporting chain is the overall leader of the
         organization (e.g., the CEO),

25   4. every person, except the overall leader, is a
         team member of exactly one static team, and

      5. the team members of a static team are the people
         who report directly to the owner of that team.

      Consequently, the CEO, for example, is not one of
30   the team members of any static team, but everyone else is
one of the team members of one static team. Also, for

each static team, the team members are referred to as the "direct reports" of the owner. Accordingly, the data construct(s) and associated content which are used to record the relationships between an owner of a static

5   team and the team members of that team are known as reporting links.

At the top of the chain shown in FIGURE 1 is a team named "CEO." Team "CEO" includes an owner, Adam, who is the chief executive officer of Acme, and two team

10   members, Bob and Chris, who report directly to Adam according to the organization's reporting chain and/or HR system. Since Team "CEO" is at the top of the chain, it has no parent team.

Team "CEO" is the parent team of teams "V.P. Sales"

15   and "V.P. Operations." Also, Bob, who is the V.P. of Sales for Acme, and Chris, who is the V.P. of Operations, are the owners of Teams "V.P. Sales" and "V.P. Operations," respectively. Among the members of Team "V.P. Operations" is Dave, who is the Director of

20   Software Development, as indicated in Team "Director, Software Development." Similarly, Team "Manager, Automotive Projects" and Team "Consulting Services" identify supervisors and respective direct reports.

In contrast to the static teams, the dynamic teams

25   are not restricted to the structure of the reporting chain. For example, as indicated by the dashed arrows in FIGURE 1, Dave is owner of Team "Product Development" and George is a member, but George is the owner of Team "Quality Assurance" and Dave is a member.

30   In any particular implementation, parent teams may be directly or indirectly associated with subordinate

teams. In the example embodiment, data records are used
to store the team definitions, and those data records
include parent-team fields that store identifiers for the
parent teams. In alternative embodiments, the parent

5   teams are identified indirectly. For example, parent
teams may be identified by cross referencing the team
owner with the lists of team members from other teams.
In any case, the data construct(s) and associated content
which are used to record the relationships between teams

10 and parent teams are known as a parent links. In the
example embodiment, all of the static teams except for
the top team are connected to the reporting chain via
respective parent links.

The example embodiment also imposes rules regarding

15 the relationships between dynamic teams and regarding
membership in dynamic teams to help ensure that teams and
goals are aligned. For example, among the restrictions
imposed by the data control logic 12 (FIGURE 4) in goal
management system 10 are the following:

20   1. every dynamic team has one owner and zero or more
              other members,
          2. the owner of a dynamic team is the person who
              created the team, and
          3. the other members of a dynamic team are the

25   people expected to work with the owner toward
              achieving one or more goals associated with the
              dynamic team.
It will be recognized by those of ordinary skill in the
art that other restrictions or rules could be used to

30 govern relationships in alternative embodiments. Also,
with regard to both static and dynamic teams, it should

be noted that the terms "owner" and "team member" describe two different types of membership. It should also be understood that the term "total membership" includes both owners and team members. Thus, a team with

5   one owner and one team member has a total membership of two.

FIGURE 1 indicates that Team "Product Development" has two team goals: "Produce software that meets all specs" and "Complete software on time." The members of

10   Team "Product Development" would be expected to help with at least one of those team goals. In the example embodiment, goal management system 10 uses specific rules to control how goals are connected with teams and otherwise managed and what types of goals are supported.

15   Those rules will now be described with reference to FIGURES 2 and 3.

As indicated in FIGURE 2, goal management system 10 supports three types of goals: team goals, team-related goals, and personal goals. Team goals are goals that the

20   owner (e.g., the team leader) creates for the team. Team-related goals are goals that members of the team set for themselves in support of a team goal. Personal goals are goals that a person creates for himself or herself, without any connection to any particular team goal.

25   Thus, as illustrated by the arrows in FIGURE 2 relating each goal to a team and/or a person, each team goal is linked to a team, and each team-related goal is linked both to a team and a person, while each personal goal is only linked to a person.

More specifically, in the example embodiment, goal management system 10 imposes the following rules regarding goals:

1. every goal is either a team goal, a team-related

5   goal, or a personal goal;

2. every goal has an owner;

3. each team goal is linked to one team and is created and managed by the owner of that team;

4. each team goal except for team goals of the top

10   team (i.e., each child goal) has a parent goal, and that parent goal is linked to the parent team of the team that is linked to the child goal;

5. each team goal except for team goals of the top team (i.e., each child goal) has an owner, and

15   that owner is one of the other members of the parent team of the team that is linked to that child goal;

6. each team-related goal is linked to one team goal;

20   7. each team-related goal is owned by one of the other members of the team associated with the team goal to which the team-related goal is linked; and

8. personal goals are not linked to any other goals.

25   In addition, the owner of a goal is preferably the person who creates and manages that goal.

FIGURE 3 illustrates how team goals are related to teams and other goals. For example, FIGURE 3 depicts a team goal named "Quality" in the TEAM GOALS column. In

30   accordance with rule 3, "Quality" is linked to one team, Team "Product Development," via the Team Owner field. In

accordance with rule 4, "Quality" has a parent goal of
"Total Customer Success," and "Total Customer Success" is
linked to the parent of Team "Product Development," "Team
Acme." Also, as per rule 5, the owner of "Quality" is

5   one of the other members of the parent team of Team
"Product Development."   That is, Dave is one of the
other members of Team "Acme".

In addition, FIGURE 3 illustrates how team-related
goals are related to teams and other goals. For example,

10 FIGURE 3 depicts a team-related goal "Completeness" in
the TEAM-RELATED GOALS column. In accordance with rule
6, "Completeness" is linked to one team goal (i.e.,
"Quality). Also, in accordance with rule 7, the owner of
"Completeness" (i.e., Pat) is one of the other members of

15 the team associated with team goal "Quality." That is,
Pat is one of the other members of Team "Product
Development."

In the example embodiment, goal management system 10
enforces the rules through use of wizards which are

20 automatically activated when users select functions for
adding and editing goals and teams. As described in
greater detail below, the wizards provide instructions
that correspond to the rules, as well as graphical
objects, such drop-down lists and lists with radio

25 buttons, that allow goals and teams to be created and
modified in accordance with the rules.

In addition, goal management system 10 allows each
person in the organization to view all goals of all teams
to which the person belongs, as well as all goals that

30 are parents to those goals, including indirect parents,
such as grandparents, great grandparents, etc. By

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providing global goal visibility for relevant goals and enforcing the above rules when people from the organization manage teams and goals, for example by creating, modifying, and/or deleting teams and goals,

5 goal management system 10 helps to ensure that the goals of all teams are aligned.

Furthermore, goal management system 10 includes various facilities for automatically soliciting evaluations for goals, while enforcing rules regarding

10 those evaluations. Among those rules is the rule that each goal for each person (other than the person at the top of the reporting chain) is to be approved by that person's direct supervisor, without regard to whether the direct supervisor is the owner of the parent goal for the

15 goal being approved. For example, with reference to FIGURE 3, Dave owns the goal "Quality," and Adam owns the goal "Total Customer Success," the parent goal to the goal "Quality." Nevertheless Dave obtains approval for the goal "Quality" not from Adam, but from Chris, since

20 Chris is Dave's supervisor, according to the reporting chain, as indicated in FIGURE 1. Those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the foregoing is one of many rules that can be implemented to enforce an organization's own approval policies.

25 Referring again to FIGURE 4, there is depicted a block diagram of goal management system 10 according to the example embodiment. The example embodiment implements goal management technologies or tools as control logic and/or data constructs that encode business

30 rules which facilitate, and enforce use of, particular goal-management practices.

Specifically, goal management system 10 includes
data control logic 12 and user-interface control logic
14. As explained in greater detail below, data control
logic 12 includes computer instructions that enforce the
5 rules described herein, and user-interface control logic
14 includes computer instructions for presenting
information to users. For instance, those computer
instructions may be programs written in the JAVA language
and/or scripts written using Java Server Pages (JSP).
10 Goal management system 10 also includes a database 16 for
storing team and goal data on appropriate data storage.
That data may be stored, for instance, in a relational
database, such as a structured query language (SQL)
database.
15 In the illustrated embodiment, database 16, user-
interface control logic 14, and data control logic 12 all
reside within a single data processing system 18. For
example, goal management system 10 may operate within a
client-server network 17, and data processing system 18
20 may be a server within network 17. Data processing
system 18 may include data storage, such as read only
memory (ROM), random access memory (RAM), one or more
hard disk drives, etc., and one or more central
processing units (CPUs). The data storage devices may
25 also be referred to as computer-usable media. Additional
computer-usable media include, without limitation,
transmission media such as wires, radio waves,
microwaves, and other electromagnetic and/or optical
carriers. Visual output may be presented primarily on
30 displays of client data processing systems 19 within
network 17, under the control of user-interface control

logic 14. The different components for data storage,
instruction processing, output presentation, etc., are
known generally as processing resources.

However, as will be readily apparent to those of
5   ordinary skill in the art, numerous changes to the
illustrated arrangement could easily by utilized in
alternative embodiments of the invention. For example,
multiple databases could be utilized, and one or more of
those databases could reside on one or more machines
10 separate from the machine hosting the data control logic.
Similarly, the data control logic and/or the
user/interface control logic could run on different
hardware, such as within network clients. Likewise,
different types of networks, different types of hardware,
15 and different programming languages could be used to
implement alternative embodiments of the goal management
system of the present invention. Alternatively, all
operations, including the display of information, could
be performed in a single data processing system. For
20 purposes of illustration, however, this detailed
description focuses on the embodiment shown in FIGURE 4.

Referring now also to FIGURE 5, there is depicted a
flowchart of an illustrative process for managing goals
according to an embodiment of the invention. The
25 illustrated process begins at block 20 with goal
management system 10 running on data processing system
18. Block 22 then depicts the detection by data control
logic 12 of a user request to add or update a goal in
goal management system 10. In response, data control
30 logic 12 ensures that the request complies with the rules
for goals described above, as indicated at block 24.

For example, if data control logic 12 detects a
request to add a goal, a wizard is activated to have the
user specify whether the goal is a personal goal, a team
goal, or a team-related goal. For team goals and team-
5   related goals, the wizard then prompts the user to select
a team to be associated with the new goal from a drop-
down list of teams, and to select a parent goal for the
new goal from a list showing all team goals linked to the
selected team. The same or similar tools are provided
10 for use in changing the characteristics of existing
goals.

In the example embodiment, the wizard facilitates
goal alignment for the team goals and the team-related
goals. One of the ways the wizard facilitates goal
15 alignment for both of those types of goals is by
dynamically determining content for the wizard screens
based on the rules for relationships between goals and
the rules for relationships between goals and teams.
Specifically, the wizard determines the content in
20 accordance with rules such as the rules for relationships
between goals of the same type and the rules for
relationships between team goals and team-related goals.
By dynamically customizing the screens with which the
user interacts, the wizard discourages or prevents the
25 user from saving goals with relationships that violate
the rules.

FIGURES 8 and 9 present example user interfaces
generated by the wizard to facilitate goal alignment.
The window illustrated in FIGURE 8 is the first window or
30 screen 210 displayed when a user modifies an existing
goal by modifying the alignment flag 200 to indicate that

the goal is to be aligned. Screen 210 is also displayed
when a user adds a goal. In particular, the illustrated
screen 210 relates to the process of modifying a team-
related goal, and the wizard therefore automatically

5   inserts instructions 212 describing the required
relationships for team-related goals. If it were a team
goal being modified, the wizard instead would have
inserted instructions describing the required
relationships for team-related goals.

10   Screen 210 also includes a set of radio buttons 214
associated with a predefined set of high-level goals for
the organization. In the example embodiment, the high-
level goals in the predefined set are team goals defined
by the organization as belonging at the top level.

15 Labels 216 indicate the top level goal associated with
each radio button 214.

        Referring to FIGURE 9, after the user has selected
the desired radio button, the wizard presents a second
screen 220 which includes a drop-down box 222 for

20 selecting the team to be linked with the goal currently
being modified (i.e., the current goal). The wizard
automatically customizes drop-down box 222 to list only
the teams which include the user. When the user selects
the desired team, the wizard cross references the

25 selected team with the selected top-level goal to
determine which team goals are both aligned with the
selected top-level goal and linked to the selected team.
If no such goals are found, the wizard automatically
flags the current goal as not aligned in flag 200 and

30 presents an appropriate message 224 in screen 220.
Otherwise, the goals resulting from the cross reference

are listed for selection as the parent goal of the
current goal.

    Referring again to FIGURE 5, upon successful
completion of the add or edit operation, data control
5 logic 12 stores the new or updated goal in database 16,
as depicted at block 26. The add or update operation
then triggers an automatic determination of whether a
child goal exists for the added or edited goal, as
indicated at block 30. If a child goal does exist, goal
10 management system 10 automatically flags or highlights
the child goal so that a user interface for the owner of
that child goal indicates that the alignment of the child
goal should be verified, as depicted at block 32. Goal
management system 10 thus prompts owners of goals to
15 check alignment whenever a goal's parent goal has
changed. If the owner is currently viewing the goal,
user-interface control logic 14 highlights the goal in
real time. Otherwise, user-interface control logic 14
highlights the goal the next time the owner displays the
20 goal.

    Once the goal is flagged or highlighted, or if it is
determined that no child goal exists, data control logic
12 then determines whether the owner of the new or edited
goal has a supervisor, as depicted at block 34. If so,
25 goal management system 10 automatically flags or
highlights the goal in a user interface for the
supervisor to indicate that the goal is waiting for
approval, as shown at block 36. Goal management system
10 thus prompts supervisors to approve or re-approve
30 goals of reporting individuals after the reporting
individuals add or change goals. As above, user-

interface control logic 14 highlights the goal immediately or upon the next viewing of the goal, depending on whether or not the goal is currently begin displayed for the supervisor.

5   Once the goal has been flagged or highlighted for approval, or if it is determined that the goal owner has no supervisor, the process returns to block 22 to process any additional add or change requests.

       Goal management system 10 includes numerous
10 additional features that help ensure that the goals are aligned, including graphical user interfaces with objects that provide alignment information and warnings and connections to tools for checking alignment. For example, with reference to FIGURE 6, an exemplary goal
15 management screen 40 is illustrated. As shown, for each displayed goal, goal management screen 40 includes a manager warning 42, a feedback warning 44, and an alignment warning 46. Goal management system 10 highlights the warnings, for example by coloring the
20 warnings red or amber, to notify a person managing his or her goals that certain actions are advisable.

       In the illustrated embodiment, for example, for each displayed goal, user-interface control logic 14 automatically highlights alignment warning 46 in response
25 to goal management system 10 detecting that a parent goal of the displayed goal has been modified or deleted. Selecting alignment warning 46, such as by clicking alignment warning 46 with a pointing device, causes goal management system 10 to open an interface for viewing the
30 modified parent goal. Alignment warning 46 thus serves as a link to the interface for viewing the parent goal.

Similarly, user-interface control logic 14
automatically highlights manager warning 42 to indicate
that the viewer's supervisor has provided feedback
pertaining to the corresponding goal. Selecting manager
5   warning 42 causes goal management system 10 to open an
interface for viewing the comments and for providing a
private line of communication between the viewer and the
supervisor. Manager warning 42 thus serves as a link to
that interface. Likewise, user-interface control logic
10 14 may automatically highlight feedback warning 42 to
indicate that one or more people other than the viewer's
supervisor have provided feedback pertaining to the
corresponding goal, with feedback warning 42 serving as a
link to an interface for viewing that feedback.
15   Goal management screen 40 also includes evaluation
status objects 50 that show which goals have been
evaluated by a supervisor and, for goals that have been
evaluated, whether or not the supervisor has given the
goal approval.
20   In addition, goal management screen 40 includes a
number of evaluation summary objects, including an
alignment indicator 48. The evaluation summary objects
are graphical objects that advise the viewer as to the
importance and effectiveness of each displayed goal.
25 Goal management system 10 allows the goal owner and the
supervisor of the goal owner to evaluate each aspect of
each goal. For team goals and team-related goals, goal
management system 10 also accepts evaluations from each
member of the team that is linked to the goal. The
30 evaluation summary objects, such as alignment indicator
48, depict an aggregate of all entered evaluations for

the aspect corresponding to that object. For instance,
if a goal owner assigns a value of ten out of ten for a
goal's alignment, but other people assign a value of one
out of ten for alignment, alignment indicator 48 would
5   show a low level of alignment, for example by filling
only a small portion of alignment indicator 48 with
color.

        Goal management system 10 also provides an interface
that indicates at a glance the relative positions of
10 particular goals and whether any particular goal should
be checked for alignment. For example, with reference to
FIGURE 7, goal management system 10 provides an alignment
roll-up window 52 that shows the chain of goals from a
given goal to the top goal. Alignment roll-up window 52
15 also indicates whether alignment should be checked
between any goal and its parent goal. For example, if
alignment between a goal and its parent should be
checked, goal management system 10 shows the link between
the goal and its parent in amber or red, rather than a
20 default color such as gray.

        Goal management system 10 also provides a member
alignment interface for owners of team goals to use to
study the goals that have been linked to those team
goals. For example, the member alignment interface lists
25 each team owned by the person using the interface (i.e.,
owned by the viewer) and each team goal that is linked to
one of those teams. In addition, the member alignment
interface lists each goal that is linked to any of those
team goals, with the linked goals in that list grouped
30 according to ownership. The member alignment interface
includes graphical objects such as manager warning 42,

feedback warning 44, alignment warning 46, alignment
indicator 48, and evaluation status object 50 to show the
current state of a selected goal in the list of goals.

The same or a similar interface is used by
5   supervisors to view the goals of their direct reports.
Furthermore, as described above, goal management system
10 automatically notifies the supervisor whenever a
direct report enters or modifies a goal, to request
approval for the new or modified goal from the
10   supervisor. That notification may be provided, for
example, by highlighting the goals in the list that are
awaiting approval. Thus, in addition to automatically
prompting goal owners to check alignment in response to
upstream changes, goal management system 10 also
15   automatically prompts supervisors to check goals of
direct report's in response to downstream changes.

CONCLUSION

As has been described, the example goal management
20   system provides convenient and effective tools for
maintaining goal alignment in a dynamic environment.
Those tools organize all of the goals within the
organization into a common structure, which helps to
ensure that different members of the organization will
25   not adopt goals with cross purposes and that all of the
goals contribute to the overall purpose or goals of the
organization. In addition, by providing this structure
and providing for increased visibility of goals, the
illustrated goal management system allows everyone to see
30   how the organization as a whole is progressing in
establishing and maintaining the hierarchy of goals and

how individual and team contributions fit in with the
larger goals of the organization.

The structure provided by the illustrated goal
management system also facilitates effective analysis of
5   the stored data. One job of a manager is to ensure that
his or her direct reports and the teams that he or she
manages are working on the right things. By codifying an
organization's team and goal information in a real-time,
flexible, consistent system and providing automated tools
10 which analyze this information, the manager's
responsibility to maintain goal alignment is made
significantly easier.

Although an illustrative embodiment of the present
invention has been described in detail, it should be
15 understood that various changes, substitutions and
alterations can be made to the illustrative embodiment
without departing from the spirit and scope of the
invention. For example, although FIGURE 1 might be
interpreted as suggesting that data constructs such as
20 identifiers or pointers within records or rows are
utilized to encode and store relationships such as parent
links in the goal management system, those of ordinary
skill in the art will appreciate that the actual
mechanisms utilized to encode such relationships may
25 easily be varied to suit the operating environment for a
particular goal management system. The implementation
specifics for any particular embodiment should be chosen
based on considerations such as the operating environment
(including hardware and software) and cost and
30 performance objectives. The scope of the invention is
therefore not limited to the particulars of the

illustrative embodiment but is defined by the appended claims.